# New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1954

Volume XV, Number 3 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of February 15, 1954

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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# "The Confidential Clerk"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 12, 1954

## Comedy, Pathos Mix In 'Confidential Clerk'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It looks as if T. S. Eliot is going to provide nearly as much social conversation with "The Confidential Clerk" as he did with "The Cocktail Party."

The new comedy at the Morosco Theater is more lucid and less pretentious. It is an infinitely melancholy observation, revealed in the most flippant surroundings. The poet is talking about opportunity and regret, and how stubbornly one can cling in later years to chances that were lightly tossed aside when first offered.

**Perpetuation of Line.**

He employs an elementary instinct, the desire to perpetuate one's self through children. And he sings his autumnal tune to a wild libretto of misplaced identity and mistaken parentage. The story becomes insanely unimportant, and only the ideas remain.

What the play has to say is literate, wise and haunting. You make your terms with life, or accept the terms it offers.

There is a distinct hypnosis about Eliot's language in the theater. Certainly there is plenty of it. Occasionally it takes on the aspects of debate, at other times the sound of a public confessional. The young lovers analyze the breath of passion out the window before it is born.

**Distinct Hypnosis.**

"The Confidential Clerk" is embellished with a performance by Ina Claire of pure brilliance. Nobody in this country, and probably anywhere, has so understood the double plane on which Eliot writes. Miss Claire acts at a pitch of comedy, but in a mood of pathos. She has such control of her role and her audience, that you feel yourself being spiritually garroted when she does not choose for you to laugh.

She is a fluttering type whom nobody has ever taken seriously. Her recourse is to mystic guidance. Through half the play she is endeavoring to prove that her husband's secretary is her own farmed out, illegitimate son. When she finds instead that a coarse and hearty young man is her issue, her slow reconciliation is a touching delight.

Claude Rains is her husband, wistful and indulgent, but terribly anxious to establish the secretary as his own boy. It is a sturdy, almost shy performance until dispair illuminates the character in the end.

**Feeling Unwanted.**

Joan Greenwood is one of a string of illegitimate children. Her flashiness is an admitted cover for feeling unwanted, but she comes to terms with her life quite happily. Miss Greenwood plays in a voice that sounds like Lynn Fontanne imitating Carol Channing, and with a brittle style that is artificial but always purposeful. She is felinely captivating.

Newton Blick, as the resigning secretary, has a mellow haughtiness which peculiarly suits the play. Douglas Watson plays the rather negative young secretary round whom all the confusion storms. Aline MacMahon is something of a seeress as his foster mother, and Richard Newton is the blustery last minute candidate for Miss Claire's maternal affection.

"THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK"

Comedy by T. S. Eliot; staged by E. Martin Browne; settings, costumes, and lighting by Paul morrison; presented by Henry Sherek and The Producers' Theatre at the Morosco Theatre, February 11, 1954. The cast:

Sir Claude Mulhammer.....Claude Rains
Eggerson.....Newton Blick
Colby Simpkins..Douglas Watson
B. Kaghan.....Richard Newton
Lucasta Angel..Joan Greenwood
Lady Elizabeth Mulhammer...Ina Claire
Mrs. Guzzard..Aline MacMahon

DAILY NEWS

February 12, 1954

## T.S.Eliot's 'The Confidential Clerk' A Stimulating, Enjoyable Comedy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

T. S. Eliot's newest venture in verse drama, "The Confidential Clerk," is, I think, his best work in this medium, and last evening at the Morosco Theatre it was given a most charming performance by a company which includes Ina Claire, Joan Greenwood, Claude Rains and Aline MacMahon.

Ever since "The Cocktail Party" was played here to the delight of many and the puzzlement of some, Eliot has been built into an intellectual enigma; he has been described as a poet who doesn't say what he means, doesn't mean what he says and takes a hellish delight in tweaking the minds of his followers. The vast amount of stuff which has been written about "The Confidential Clerk" since it was produced in London has led many New Yorkers to doubt their own minds—to doubt if they have the cerebral capacity to understand what the hell Eliot may be driving at.

**A Cheerful Plot.**

My mind has always been such a simple one that I have never doubted it, so, as a playgoer, I had an absorbing and stimulating lot of fun last evening at the Morosco. The plot of "The Confidential Clerk" is no more profound than a musical comedy libretto or a fairy tale, dealing as it does, so very cheerfully, with foundlings, changelings and mistaken identities.

The play is a very superior drawing-room comedy—one of the best, I'd say, since Shaw grew too old. It is lightly cynical, swiftly witty and wonderfully well played by a company directed by E. Martin Browne. And, though it is written by a poet, it is not "poetry."

Poetry is not necessarily deliberately measured cadences and rhymes, but it must always be the best possiole use of words. There is no hint of metric rhythm as the fine cast plays "The Confidential Clerk"; the poetry is in its shimmering clarity of statement and in the profundity with which it views a curious and amusing assortment of human beings.

**Profound in Character.**

The play is, from first to last, a parlor comedy about upper-class Britishers. Its plot is facile and genially artificial. But even so, the comedy is literally profound, for Eliot, without the audience or even his characters seeming to be aware of it, has wrought a change in each of these people—and the change has come from within the person himself. There are many amusing exterior events, but these are just polish and glitter; it is the interior events, the changes in the mind of each character, which make this a fine and fascinating play. As is said of one of the people, "He still has his inner world—a world that's more real." And before the evening is over Eliot has proved that reality does come from within.

**Most Interesting People.**

I shouldn't bother you—or Eliot—with too much of the plot. Claude Rains, a titled tycoon, has a fashionable household consisting of the following: A wife, Ina Claire, who is a flutterhead and a faddist; Newton Blick, an old private secretary or confidential clerk, who is about to retire; Douglas Watson, a new confidential clerk, who is really Rains' illegitimate son. A frequent visitor is Joan Greenwood, a fashionable young woman who poses as a friend of the family but is actually Rains' illegitimate daughter. Visiting with her is Richard Newton, a successful foundling who wants to marry her. Miss Claire, not to be outdone by her husband, also has a son, but she lost track of him long ago. Now, suddenly, she thinks the new confidential clerk is her long-lost boy.

This is musical comedy, farce or fairy-tale stuff and Eliot and the audience have a great deal of fun with it. I don't have time now to go into the great merits of the individual performances, but they rank among the best in the current theatre. The real value of "The Confidential Clerk" lies in the surprising realization, after the curtain has come down, that one has been led to know a number of interesting people most intimately. That's what I mean by profound.

**Daily Mirror**

February 12, 1954

## *Eliot's 'Confidential Clerk' Is Superlative Theatre*

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"The Confidential Clerk" is the brightest and easiest to understand of all T. S. Eliot's plays. Given an excellent production by Henry Sherek and The Producers' Theatre (Roger L. Stevens, Robert Whitehead and Robert W. Dowling), it delighted a smart first audience at the Morosco Theatre last evening.

**"THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK"** has to do with a British financier who believes himself to be the father of an illegitimate son and daughter. His wife is convinced that she, to, has a son somewhere, farmed out to foster parents when his father embarrassingly permitted himself to be killed by a rhinoceros on a big game hunt before their marriage could take place.

**Both are partly right. Sir Claude Mulhammer's daughter is actually his, but the son whom he expects to carry on his business turns out to be the child of the sister of his former love. As for Lady Elizabeth Mulhammer, she also eventually discovers the whereabouts of her progeny.**

Sir Claude had always secretly wanted to be a ceramist, a molder of pottery, but went into finance when he realized that he could only be a second-rate one. As for the supposed son, he is a frustrated organist, who finds a happier solution for his desires than did Sir Claude.

**IT'S REALLY NOT** as confusing as it sounds in synopsis. Lighthearted on the surface, it has serious undertones. It is a framework for the exposition of Eliot's philosophy, which we happen to find stimulating and fascinating. It has some of the gaiety and paradox of "H.M.S. Pinafore" and "The Importance of Being Earnest."

**Among the ideas that Eliot tosses off are: that we have a divine spark, more compelling even than heredity, that we are closer to God than to one another; that we are constantly changing and are never tomorrow what we were yesterday; that it is better to be successful at something we don't particularly like, than mediocre at something we do. That is, unless we can make a happy compromise with facts.**

It is wonderful to have Ina Claire back with us, after an absence of seven years, as the erratic but practical Lady Elizabeth. She can give a patina and bring charm to flightiness, such as few actresses in our time have been able to do. She is, as always, captivating.

**CLAUDE RAINS** is perfect as Sir Claude, who comes to the realization that you must pay for your mistakes; that you cannot demand affection suddenly when you haven't given it in the formative years of a child. Aline MacMahon is impressive as Mrs. Guzzard, who has a Delphic gift of prophecy and fulfillment, a sort of deus ex machina.

**Joan Greenwood, British film star, brings beauty of speech and the ability to create a mood to the role of Sir Claude's insecure daughter. Douglas Watson, one of our best young actors, is admirable as the son who isn't the son—but knows what he wants from life. Newton Blick and Richard Newton are ever so skillful in other parts.**

"The Confidential Clerk" is superlative theatre, entertaining, provocative and rewarding. It is stated in a poetry that plays like prose. It is tasteful, thoughtful and vastly enjoyable. It makes one realize just how exciting an evening in the playhouse can be. It adds stature to this or any season.

**Journal-American**

February 12, 1954

# Rewarding Drama

## Appreciation of Play Takes Hard Work

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE would seem to be two ways to approach "The Confidential Clerk," the new T. S. Eliot play which opened at the Morosco last night. One way is to enter the theatre in a relaxed mood, seeking amiable entertainment in the form of a few laughs, an engrossing situation here and there, and some admirable acting.

Judged on such a basis I would say that you might feel cheated. For strictly on the surface much of Mr. Eliot's poetry is lost, long passages are devoted to abstruse philosophy and one might easily conclude that never before had so many words been devoted to so little.

There is a wonderful performance by Ina Claire, yes, and of course Claude Rains is simply divine, and that little English girl, what's her name? —oh, yes, Joan Greenwood—she's terribly pretty. But REALLY, what's it all about?

The other way to see the show is to go in and take the coat off your mind and really go to work. This involves listening quite carefully to everything that is said and making yourself aware of the cadence of the lines and realizing, almost from the time the curtain rises, that the author has something more to offer than a rather confused comedy of manners. This is a chore, but it can be rewarding.

### Many Meanings

Among the viewers who come under the latter category I doubt that any two will agree on the exact meaning of Mr. Eliot's message. You can start with God and His relationship to man and work your way down; there are no limits to the interpretations which may be developed, and it would not surprise me to be told that Mr. Rains actually represents Russia and Miss Claire is the atomic bomb.

In my compendium I would say that the point is, merely: most of us get our wish in life, but it is rarely granted in the form we desire. Okay, so face up to it and make the most of it; it's better than you think. (In any case, you're stuck with it.)

Having thus climbed out on a tottering limb I can proceed with a brief synopsis of the plot: Claude Rains, a Britisher of wealth, is about to employ Douglas Watson, a young man he believes to be his illegitimate son, as a new confidential clerk.

He hopes that the lad will ingratiate himself with his wife; Ina Claire, to such a degree that she will adopt him.

This might have worked out favorably if another of his illegitimate children, Joan Greenwood, had not fallen in love with the new clerk. This, despite the fact that she is practically betrothed to Richard Newton, a brash and successful young business man.

### All Ends Well

Well, as it develops, Newton is really Miss Claire's ill-begotten son and the new confidential clerk is not Mr. Rains' child after all.

But in the end everybody gets his rather muddled wish: Greenwood returns to Newton, Miss Claire has a son, and Watson, the confidential clerk, is free to pursue his original ambition to be an organist.

The father, Mr. Rains, is left to contemplate his early transgressions without further responsibility.

Ina Claire is superb in her long-awaited return to Broadway—forget the import of her lines—and Claude Rains gives one of his suave, ingratiating performances as Pops.

Miss Greenwood scores heavily with her stylized enunciation, her fragile manner; Douglas Watson is sincere and assured; Richard Newton is believably brazen; Aline MacMahon contributes a brief and competent portrayal to the last act and Newton Blick, as the ex-confidential clerk, nearly dominates every scene in which he appears.

All in all it's a rather simple problem. Hard day in the office? Just want to sit back and see a good show? . . . Don't go.

On the other hand, if you love the theatre, like the language and are willing to work—by all means go to see "The Confidential Clerk."

**The New York Times**

February 12, 1954

### *Comedy by T. S. Eliot With Ina Claire, Claude Rains and Joan Greenwood*

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Since T. S. Eliot is the grand panjandrum of modern letters, everyone expects another masterpiece from him. "The Confidential Clerk," which opened at the Morosco last evening, represents a deliberate attempt to be ordinary. Unfortunately, Mr. Eliot has succeeded.

Nearly everyone who reads newspapers must know by now that "The Confidential Clerk" is a comedy of mistaken identities. In the first act Sir Claude is certain that Colby Simpkins is his illegitimate son, reared in discreet obscurity in the country. In the second act, Lady Elizabeth (wife to Sir Claude, as they say in old play books) is certain that Colby is her illegitimate son, lost in the obscurity of the country years ago. In the third act Colby turns out to be the son of Mrs. Guzzard, who lives in the country. And B. Kaghan, a much brasher young man, turns out to be Lady Elizabeth's illegitimate son, formerly a resident of the country.

* * *

This bald summary of the plot represents Mr. Eliot unfairly. For he is a sincere, as well as an eminent man; and he has something more in mind than a farce situation. In the back of his head, "The Confidential Clerk," has to do with inherited characteristics and a man's duty to accept his place in the world—"accepting—the terms that life imposes on you," as one of the characters expresses it.

But this department will not attempt to pluck out the heart of Mr. Eliot's mysteries. It takes a lot of patience and study to discover what Mr. Eliot is saying by indirection, he looks so bland and mild on the surface. And if, by chance, he is saying that everyone should be satisfied with his lot in life, it is possible that many of us do not want to hear it. Mind you, Mr. Eliot may not be saying that at all.

* * *

But if the interpreters of the scripture finally conclude that Mr. Eliot is saying anything like that, we would have to point out that he is his own poorest example. He is an illustrious poet. He has shaken the world with poetry. He is author of a poetic masterpiece called "Murder in the Cathedral" that deals with glory and reverence with the kingdom of the spirit. But "The Confidential Clerk" is at least the second step Mr. Eliot has taken down to the level of the theatre, and it represents a repudiation of his own genius.

Shakespeare and Wilde used with success the formula of mistaken identities; and Shaw wrote wittily about egotists engrossed with their likes and dislikes. Mr. Eliot cannot row in these galleys. The first half of "The Confidential Clerk" is a polite, neatly written, prolonged exposition of a complicated plot, and fairly monononous, too. For Mr. Eliot's style has little theatrical variety or bounce.

The comedy does not come to life until half way through the second act Lady Elizabeth first suspects that Colby is her son. During the rest of the evening Mr. Eliot begins to reap the harvest of his meticulous exposition; and some emotional values turn up in the text. Colby becomes a pathetic figure. His parenthood is passed around from one person to another with no regard for his personal feeling. But Mr. Eliot's characters are bloodless and artificial, and their fate in the world is an academic affair.

Except for the acting of Ina Claire, the performance is pedantic. Miss Claire, as Lady Elizabeth, plays the part of an empty-headed dabbler in spiritual cults. She gives a mettlesome, radiant comic performance in which every detail is carefully mitered. It's wonderful having her back again, lightening the world with her ironic humors.

Under E. Martin Browne's respectful direction, the other actors give grave and well-bred performances in which there is little emotion. As an obscure woman from the country who has had some experience with life, Aline MacMahon gives a warm, understanding performance with a good mind showing through. But Claude Rains' acting of Sir Claude is formal. Joan Greenwood's portrait of a rebellious young lady is formally belligerent and Douglas Watson, Newton Blick and Richard Newton play with conventional affability.

Mr. Eliot's comedy is an ordinary one. That is the most disappointing thing about it.

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NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

February 12, 1954

THEATER

## *'The Confidential Clerk'*

By WALTER F. KERR

T. S. ELIOT has been struck by the truly comic grotesquerie of every man's fumbling search for identity. To make his point on the stage he has fashioned a deliberate grotesque—a play in which the search is serious but the course is overlaid with a thousand near-slapstick booby-traps.

In "The Confidential Clerk" each of the characters is trying to know himself by coming to know his father, human and or divine. To do so, he must muddle his way through this absurd world as it really is, tripping over and tangling with all sorts of unreliable mothers, dishonest nurses and fantastically mixed marriages we all make. The soul, says Mr. Eliot, is often pursued by a slapstick; let's put both soul and slapstick on the stage.

* * *

I think it is perfectly possible to grant Mr. Eliot his form. What is difficult to understand, watching the new piece at the Morosco, is his failure to stick with it. If we are to view the problems of personality and identity on the plane of intellectual farce, we ought to be bubbling with merriment at every improbable new disclosure. We ought not only to be conscious of irony but irrepressibly delighted by it.

But "The Confidential Clerk" is nowhere near so funny as you may have heard. It has its small, wry humors, its wan and rather rueful witticisms. When Ina Claire announces "I don't believe in facts" and makes the announcement as though she were terribly sorry for the facts, you are certain to be amused. This sort of ebullience is rare, though. Mr. Eliot's mockery is never emphatic enough, or whole-hearted enough, for sustained mirth.

We are left, then, to brood and to speculate on the more serious overtones. But here the impudent face of farce, the deliberate overlay of nonsense, stands in our way. The outline is light the background is dark, and we have to look at both simultaneously—going just a shade cross-eyed in the process. Mr. Eliot's most considered "ideas" are ghosts hovering behind some fly-by-night people, and you don't know whether to watch the ghosts or the people.

* * *

This is somewhat distressing when you want to settle down with Ina Claire for a good chummy gabfest of the flightiest kind, or when you want to admire Joan Greenwood's long neck, tip-tilted smile, and enchantingly froglike voice. (Miss Greenwood is really an enchanted frog, just up from the lily-pond, and I love her). These blessed ladies draw you instantly to them. But Mr. Eliot is busy drawing invisible logarithms on a blackboard behind them, and you are distracted from the actresses by the author and from the author by the actresses.

* * *

Let's put in a few words about the players before it gets too late. The aforementioned Miss Greenwood is superb as she stands, with her chin tucked low and an air of raffish refinement glowing all about her, in Sir Claude Mulhammer's West End drawing room. She is downright magnificent as she visits the rooms of Sir Claude's supposed son only to writhe in torment as she finds that she can never marry him.

The aforementioned Miss Claire, still looking like a dazzling line-drawing from the most fashionable magazine of the '20s, is delectable beyond belief as she scrunches up in a chair, glazes her eyes, and accepts as her son a breezy youngster she detests. She has one fascinating moment on the serious side, too. The actress has been asked to remark soberly that "There is something in all of us that is not just heredity" . . . and, as she does it, she stops short, cocks her head, and literally listens to that "something" moving about the room. Her evocative power, in this instant, is in itself miraculous.

To Claude Rains falls much of the more sober speculation of the evening, and he makes this rich man's passion for the making of pottery shiningly real. Aline McMahon is a sort of suburban goddess who hands down fatal decisions all 'round at the evening's end; she is a model of simple sincerity. Douglas Watson's well-meaning but rootless clerk is affectingly naive, and Newton Bleck and Richard Newton are fine as the play's only confident characters.

"The Confidential Clerk" has the spectacular distinction of being written in English—English that is clean, spare, purposeful and precise. But the play as a whole gives off a curious double image, like a Sunday comic strip on which the colors have slipped.

## New York Post

February 12, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

### T. S. Eliot's 'Confidential Clerk'

T. S. Eliot's new play, "The Confidential Clerk," which was a source of controversy and uproar before it even reached town, opened at the Morosco Theater last night, and the battles over it should really get started today. As one of the critical enthusiasts for "The Cocktail Party," I must say at once that it seems to me nowhere near as interesting or distinguished as the eminent poet-dramatist's earlier work, which I still don't mind having hailed as a "masterpiece." Although it was supposed to be simpler in the content of its ideas than "The Cocktail Party," I won't even concede that. But I suppose you should see it.

It is, I think, worth seeing chiefly because it brings Ina Claire back to the stage in a good part, and, when you watch Miss Claire, who, incidentally, is looking her best, you are receiving a fascinating lesson in what a brilliant light comedienne should be. You will also see Claude Rains and some other effective actors in excellent roles. I suspect you will likewise encounter a curious case of what happens to an important dramatist with a justifiable reputation for being a deep thinker, when he decides to go in for showmanship and what he hopes is the light touch. Finally, you'll be able to get in on some nice arguments.

**The Ideas**

It was always my impression that "The Cocktail Party," despite its fame as a very cryptic play, actually was quite simple to follow, at least on enough of its levels to make it worth the trouble. In "The Confidential Clerk," which is concerned with relationships between parents and children, I think the ideas are far less worthy of bothering about. Mr. Eliot appears to be saying that sons have a way of following in their fathers' footsteps, even when they don't know who their parents are. Possibly he is also saying that it is better to be a good business man than a bad artist, a viewpoint that William Saroyan once controverted eloquently in a play called "My Heart's in the Highlands."

But the most striking thing about "The Confidential Clerk" is not its viewpoint, but its sheer oddness as a dramatic narrative. I am inclined to think that Mr. Eliot was writing three plays at once. The first has the outline of a work by Oscar Wilde or W. S. Gilbert, dealing with children whose identities had been shifted when they were babies. The second is a less elaborate and more human account of the soul struggles of a boy and a girl who had come to accept their illegitimacy. The third, I suppose, is the author's celebrated mysticism in action, but I doubt if Mr. Eliot bothered much about this, nor need you.

**The Words**

Yesterday I was complaining that Irish dramatists sometimes suffered from using too many words. In his new play, Mr. Eliot makes them seem virtually taciturn. I feel sure that "The Confidential Clerk" would be helped considerably if some of the garrulousness were sternly cut from it. This assuredly wouldn't harm the author's famous prose-like verse, because there is little sign here of the poetic touch. Once, however, that the play has really got started and one acccepts the willful perversity of the narrative structure, Mr. Eliot is a good enough showman to make his play interesting as sheer commercial theater.

In addition to the glowing and infinitely resourceful performance of Miss Claire as a charming nitwit of a mother, and the characteristically incisive portrayal by Mr. Rains of a father with a couple of children out of wedlock, there is expert work by Aline MacMahon as the Eliot equivalent of Wilde's Miss Prism, Newton Blick as a wise man of business, and Douglas Watson, Joan Greenwood and Richard Newton as the scrambled offspring. There is showmanship in the production, as well as in the writing of "The Confidential Clerk," but it hardly raises the standing of Mr. Eliot as a dramatist of important quality.

# "The Immoralist"

## Daily Mirror

February 9, 1954

### 'Immoralist' Treats Hard Subject With Sympathy

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Ruth and Augustus Goetz have made a dignified and sympathetic dramatization of Andre Gide's "The Immoralist," and Billy Rose has mounted it effectively at the Royale Theatre. It is a work that calls for an intelligent approach, if it is not to be offensive. And this it has had.

* * *

**"THE IMMORALIST"** has to do with the plight of the homosexual, often scorned and shunned by the moral and usually blackmailed and exploited by the corrupt. Gide wrote at a time when the law had not taken cognizance of the fact that such unfortunates are the victims of errant genes.

**Though most of us now take a more understanding view, the statutes still do not provide sufficient protection for them. They have no status in our civilization. They doubtless have to pay a terrible price for nature's quirks. If "The Immoralist" does nothing else, it may awaken us to a sober consideration of the subject.**

Gide is concerned with a young archaeologist who marries in the hope that he may find a solution for his personal problem. He takes his bride on a tour of North Africa that ends in a panicky flight to a desert oasis. The husband suffers a nervous breakdown, and the wife takes to drink.

* * *

**IN A CLIMACTIC** scene he tells her the truth about himself and decides to send her back to her native village in France. There, the wife, pregnant because of a single adventure with her reluctant spouse, tries to build a life for herself and the coming child. The husband follows her and a reconciliation of sorts ensues.

**Daniel Mann has directed "The Immoralist" at a deliberate pace, deliberately avoiding a showy display of the sensational. Louis Jourdan acts the young scientist with a sincerity and honesty that compel respect. Geraldine Page, as the disillusioned wife, is quite touching.**

Charles Dingle is good as a humane friend and retainer. James Dean and David J. Stewart, two excellent actors, are rightly realistic—the one as a venal panderer and the other as a tragic figure who accepts his fate with courage and no false pretenses. There are sound performances, too, by John Heldabrand, Paul Huber and Adelaide Klein.

* * *

**GEORGE JENKINS** has designed simple and atmospheric settings; Motley, authentic costumes.

**"The Immoralist" emerges as a tract, rather than a drama. It becomes theatre only in flashes. It is discussion on a high plane of a serious problem, instead of a flamboyant, action-packed expose of the unsavory. If Rose and the Goetzes have saerificed box-office values to taste and integrity, we can only admire them for it.**

Frankly, "The Immoralist" is not much of a play. It is too reticent in its statements, too subdued in mood to be theatrically absorbing. Its appeal is likely to be limited—limited to those interested in sociology. The emotion is implied in the script, though seldom realized on stage. It is like sitting on a dynamite charge that never explodes.

**"THE IMMORALIST"**

Play by Ruth and Augustus Goetz; based on Andre Gide's novel; staged by Daniel Mann; scenery by George Jenkins; costumes by Motley; lighting by Abe Feder; presented by Billy Rose at the Royale Theatre, February 8, 1954. The cast:

Marcelline.....Geraldine Page
Dr. Robert....John Heldabrand
Bocage.....Charles Dingle
Michel.....Louis Jourdan
Bachir.....James Dean
Dr. Garrin.....Paul Huber
Moktir.....David J. Stewart
Sidma.....Adelaide Klein
Dolit.....Bill Gunn

**The New York Times**
February 9, 1954

## *'The Immoralist,' by Ruth and Augustus Goetz, Made From Andre Gide's Novel*

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Having made "The Heiress" from a Henry James novel, Ruth and Augustus Goetz have now dramatized André Gide's "The Immoralist," which was acted at the Royale last evening. This is the autobiographical novel Gide wrote in 1902 about the tragic marriage of a devoted girl to a man who cannot escape from homosexuality.

To Gide this affliction was the source of a lifetime's anguish, particularly since it withered the life of the woman he married. Writing sparingly, almost without emotion, Mr. and Mrs. Goetz have preserved the detachment, the dignity and the tragedy. Magnificently acted by a company led by Geraldine Page and Louis Jourdan, "The Immoralist" is an admirable piece of work that retains the integrity of Gide and does credit to the taste of the Goetzes.

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It is the story of a scrupulous and pleasant young man who marries a neighborhood girl against his best judgment. She has loved him for years and cannot keep silent about it at the moment when he appears to be leaving France forever. Over his head hangs the memory of a scandal at school when he was eleven. He has never dared hope that he is free from the "abominable crime" for good.

But he marries her in desperation. The rest of "The Immoralist" describes the slow destruction of the marriage during the year they live in a corrupt village in North Africa. For him it is a joyless descent into a segregated and hated society. She, in turn, faces the loneliness of a woman who has offered love that cannot be accepted. In the last dour scene they face a lifetime of doom together with whatever courage and principle they can find within themselves.

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Let's not imply that "The Immoralist" is a "pleasant play," to use Shaw's old term of reference. The subject is depressing. And the studied bareness of the writing gives the play a coldness and detachment that are not exactly inviting. But given the theme and the source, it is difficult to see how Mr. and Mrs. Goetz could have gotten closer to the sort of tragedy that goes beyond will into the awful areas of fate. Gide was an intellectual first and a creative writer second. "The Immoralist" is an intellectual tragedy of considerable artistic distinction. Like Gide, who spent a career wrestling with his soul over his misfortune, the play has to be accepted and respected.

It is beautifully produced and acted. George Jenkins has designed two excellent sets—a French farmhouse interior of dowdy elegance and a lazy, makeshift house in North Africa. Abe Feder's lighting brings them vividly to life. Motley's period costumes of 1900 have an old fashioned loveliness that is decorative without being gay or self-conscious.

Under Daniel Mann's direction, the performance is extraordinarily honest and skillful. In the part of the distraught wife Miss Page fulfills the hopes that theatregoers have had for her since she appeared in "Summer and Smoke" downtown. She gives a deeply felt portrait of a broken heart and a wounded spirit—a portrait that is delicately shaded by her own perceptions as an actress.

Mr. Jourdan's husband is evenly matched. Personable and genuine, remorseful and sympathetic, yet resolved to face life without whining or evasions, Mr. Jourdan's interpretation of the part helps to give the play stature and sincerity. The other parts are well played, too—Charles Dingle as the compassionate, redoubtable manager of the estate; David J. Stewart as an educated native of the African village; John Heldabrand as a scornful French physician; Paul Huber as a provincial army doctor; Adelaide Klein and James Dean as African villagers.

Mr. Mann's direction does seem to be too deliberately paced in the last act, and perhaps the tempo is too uniform all the way through. But he has gotten under the surface of the play by recognizing the spiritual torment of the characters. "The Immoralist" is an admirable piece of work. The tragedy is austere, crushing and genuine.

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NEW YORK
**Herald Tribune**
February 9, 1954

THEATER

## *'The Immoralist'*

By WALTER F. KERR

IN ADAPTING Andre Gide's "The Immoralist" for the stage, Ruth and Augustus Goetz have brought a quiet, patient candor to the subject of homosexuality. But a quiet, patient candor is not precisely an exhilarating theatrical vein. There is taste in abundance — in the writing, in the decor, in the acting—at the Royale; but there is very little emotion.

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"The Immoralist" details the misadventures of a young archaeologist who has been expelled from school at the age of eleven for improper conduct, but who has studiously downed the ghosts of his past. Given a chance at marriage—a devoted girl offers him a formal proposal—he snatches it gratefully. On his North African honeymoon he is almost immediately surrounded by cultivated tribesmen who are frank in their admiration for "beautiful men."

The tormented young man comes to accept his aberration. His wife, after a long and agonized refusal to face the facts, takes to what she calls "a little wine after dinner." At the moment the husband decides to abandon her for good, she discovers herself pregnant. The play's last scene finds them living together once more, painfully agreeing to try to find a "middle way."

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The evening does not wholly escape certain vagrant, and possibly unavoidable, overtones of humor ("I feel completely unnecessary," cries the distracted wife). It occasionally takes on the sonorous echoes of a tract. ("The art of living consists in taking pleasures as they pass, and the keenest pleasures are not always intellectual, nor are they moral.")

For the most part, however, the authors have kept to a muted, careful, conscientious prose style which holds the subject matter up to clear view. The trouble is that it must also be held at arm's length. Restraint is imposed by the materials, and Mr. and Mrs. Goetz have honorably obliged. But the necessary restraint which is one of the play's distinctions also robs it of intensity, immediacy, and any kind of participation.

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Even as honest and urgent actors are holding your attention, the veiled and oblique things they are murmuring to one another produce an almost somnambulistic air of detachment. A native shepherd fondles a small piece of carved stone and gazes directly into the eyes of the unwilling archaeologist. A disreputable houseboy quietly offers to dance for him. Husband and wife hold onto one another in bewilderment, asking all sorts of things with their eyes and speaking around cautious corners.

You always know what it is that the characters are really saying. But you also know that they do not wish to say these things, that they are never under any circumstances going to bring open passion to them. "What is there to say, Michael?" whispers the forlorn bride toward the end of the play. "Think of the things we can never say to each other—the questions we can never ask." The lines constitute an apt description of the technique, and the limited impact, of an interesting but arid play.

The evening finds its strongest images in Geraldine Page's second-act torment. The actress is something of a technical virtuoso, able to make a sinking inflection, or a defeated gesture, shimmer with meaning. She has also, at this writing, mastered her earlier tendency to splatter her effects too generously over the stage. For nearly all of "The Immoralist" she is giving a reserved, economical, beautifully shaded performance.

This reserve proves doubly valuable when, at the crisis in these two tangled lives, Miss Page is able to let herself go. Now her frantic, aborted grasp at a winestopper becomes freshly exciting. When the actress pounds the table for feeble emphasis, she is suddenly exciting. And as her mouth stretches into a taut, hysterical laugh at the irony of her pregnancy, as her pinched and angry features grow ugly under intolerable strain, she is a star who has learned to shape a whole performance toward its climax, rather than the mistress of a million distributed devices.

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Louis Jourdan handles the difficult central role with great simplicity. He is plausible and persuasive at every turn—direct, open-eyed, effortless. Charles Dingle is briefly ingratiating as a warm-hearted family retainer, James Dean makes a colorfully insinuating scapegrace, and David J. Stewart is rich in oily authority as a shepherd with a philosophy of his own. Daniel Mann has staged the edgy situations with infinite sensitivity, and George Jenkins has backed them up with two handsomely designed, and brilliantly lighted, settings: a French provincial living room, and a sultry North African patio.

## New York Post

February 9, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

### A Grave Drama About Abnormality

Let it be said for "The Immoralist" that it is a serious attempt to treat a difficult dramatic subject with dignity, and that it doesn't try for easy sensationalism. It is also well acted. But after these compliments have been paid the play by Ruth and Augustus Goetz, which had its official opening at the Royale Theater last night, I'm afraid there is little I can add on behalf of their dramatization of Andre Gide's at least semi-autobiographical novel about the complex marital problem of a homosexual archeologist at the turn of the century.

It is my impression that a play which sets out to deal with such a theme must justify itself by either theatrical fireworks of an exceptionally high order or something particularly illuminating to say on its topic. Since "The Immoralist" is a quiet and soft-spoken drama, staged with considerable deliberation, and hasn't a great deal of revealing light to throw on the subject, for all of its sympathetic attitude toward both husband and wife, it is neither dramatically exciting nor particularly moving as an evening in the theater.

**Husband and Wife**

The two central figures in the Goetz play are the troubled young scientist, who had been expelled from school for his offense, and a shy French girl, who is interested in him because he is the only man who doesn't scare her. He marries her in the hope that she will save him from himself, takes her on one of his expeditions to North Africa, and has as much trouble becoming a husband in anything save name as the poor young fellow in "Lullaby." In addition, he finds, slightly to his consternation, that various Arabs understand him only too well.

One of the Arabs is a particularly slimy young man, who taunts and tries to blackmail him. The other is a dignified former teacher in the university at Fez, who has also been expelled for his sexual aberrations. He is something of a philosopher and he tells the archeologist that the mistake he is making is in trying to live in two worlds at once, and that he will only find peace when he has accepted the fact of what he is. This, however, doesn't keep the unhappy Frenchman from becoming a father and striving to have an existence with his wife, who has taken to drink.

Since I am not in general, a practitioner of the form of reviewing that goes in for a long recounting of plots, I apologize for giving so many details of the story of "The Immoralist." But it strikes me as the best way of explaining the quality of the play. I should add that the drama has unusual objectivity in contemplating its subject, that it seems to take a long time to say what it has to say, that it is equivocal and intentionally far from conclusive in its ending, and that, despite several emotional scenes, it achieves a minimum of poignancy.

The difficult role of the archeologist is played with admirable tact and sympathy by Louis Jordan, and Geraldine Page, with her woebegone voice, is believable and touching as the unhappy wife. David J. Stewart is quietly effective as the philosophical homosexual, and James Dean is realistically unpleasant as the slimy one. Charles Dingle is helpful as a loyal servitor of the scientist, and so are John Heldabrand, Paul Huber and Adelaide Klein in smaller roles. "The Immoralist" seemed to me pretty dull theatergoing. Perhaps it should have been covered by Max Lerner.

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## Journal-American

February 9, 1954

# Fails to Stir Serious Emotional Reaction

By JOHN McCLAIN

TAKING a highly charitable view of "The Immoralist," which was revealed to the critics last night at the Royale after a week of paid previews, one is obliged to report that it is a strangely unfulfilling effort.

The elements of good drama are there, the quality of Andre Gide's novel appears to have been faithfully translated to the stage yet it somehow fails to inspire any serious emotional reaction.

Why? I should say the fault lies half with the original conception of M. Gide's, half with the current conception of M. Billy Rose, who produced.

The situation involved is that of a congenital homosexual who marries and then discovers that he is hopelessly incapable of leading a normal marital life. He and his wife go to North Africa where he is pursuing some geologi .l studies, but he soon comes to the realization his problem is not geographical. Even in Biskra there are some characters of his own persuasion and his wife is left to pine, and drink, alone.

### Ageless Dilemma

Finally facing the fact that she is unwanted, the wife determines to return to her home in Normandie without him—even though she knows she is pregnant. Back in France she is preparing to have her child and face the criticism of the neighbors when her husband suddenly appears.

For the first time he learns he is about to be a father and they are thereupon caught up in an insoluable crisis: she loves him still, he can never love her completely; her life without him is ignominious, his life without her is degrading. The only solution lies in a compromise, which he accepts.

This is certainly a provocative consideration of an ageless dilemma, but at the Royale it is given merely a surface reading. I was never once made to feel the tragedy of the husband's neurosis, nor moved by his wife's realization of it. The writing seems to skirt the fringes of the issue, rather than facing up to facts that have become fairly pedestrian in our present world.

Here is a girl who insists upon marrying a guy who is not really a guy, and what happened thereafter failed to capture me.

Geraldine Page, the wife, is a new actress of unquestioned ability and promise, but I think she might have aided the proceedings had she been less pathetic and wistful from the start. This may not be her failing in the least, but it doesn't heighten the dramatic impact, either. There is an air of doom about this girl, and it's no great surprise when it sets in.

As the husband Louis Jourdan displays himself as a highly decorative and competent performer. Once again, and through no omission of his, I felt a deficiency in the relationship between him and his wife—apart from the obvious one—which robs the basic situation of much of its merit. One is never convinced that he has any strenuous emotional yearnings in any direction.

Charles Dingle turns in one of his masterful jobs as a family retainer and Paul Huber is relaxed and authoritative as a colonial doctor. George Jenkins has designed two capable sets: a 1900 Normandie living room and a North African bedroom and porch.

Bill Rose will beat the drum for this one and may get away with it. But in my considered opinion it is fare, only fair, for a small and specialized audience.

DAILY NEWS

February 9, 1954

# 'The Immoralist' Sure Enough Is

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"The Immoralist," which was presented before reviewers last evening at the Royale Theatre, is a clinical drama about a sex deviate who manages one husbandly gesture. As a result, the mixed-up gent and his generally frustrated frau decide that they had better go on living together in the hope that their child will turn out normal. I suppose another title for the piece could be "From Here to Maternity."

The play has been adapted by Ruth and Augustus Goetz from a novel by the late Andre Gide. There are two splendid settings—a turn-of-the-century French drawing-room and a sunny North African patio—by George Jenkins, and the lighting of these by Abe Feder is admirable. There are some fine period costumes by Motley.

The principal roles are played by Louis Jourdan and Geraldine Page. They are good actors. I was embarrassed for them last evening. And for me, too.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 9, 1954

# 'Immoralist' Marked By Tender Tragedy

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The Immoralist," playing at the Royale Theater, is a delicate, tender tragedy which is beautifully acted and exquisitely directed.

In spite of all this, it may well leave you cold. It simply is not moving, not even touching, owing to the fact that the leading characters have so little life outside the immediate snare of their personal tragedy.

"The Immoralist" is a young man whose father has bequeathed him a modest fortune in trust because of long-term doubts of the youth's propriety. At the age of 11, the boy was involved in an incident which caused his humiliating dismissal from school.

**Girl Proposes.**

A girl who has grown up with him, proposes to him, and the boy marries her immediately. They go to live in North Africa, where he blames his delicate health for the platonic nature of the marriage.

A corrupt houseboy senses the emptiness of the union and humiliates the young man, while deliberately tempting him. A shepherd offers the husband a place to work at his archeological books. This Arab may be cynical, but he is realistic.

Taunted by the houseboy, the husband has consummated the marriage, but then draws away from his wife until she becomes an alcoholic. He tells her the truth and insists she return home to France. She does, knowing she is pregnant.

The close finds them both back in Normandy, hoping to brave out some solution to their tragedy through the child. This is not a story's end, but rather a start.

**Undrawn Character.**

The play has two characteristics which prevent it from being very satisfying.

The tragedy touches both of them, but the original problem is represented as being the man's. Involuntarily, it seems, the wife is as neurotic as he is, in her own way. Yet there is nothing one can define about her character. The play badly needs further explanation of her proposal and continued initiative in the empty marriage.

The other tendency which cools one's interest is the egocentricity of the two leading figures. Their problem remains private, because they have a masochistic absorption in their own injuries.

"The Immoralist" is beautifully produced.

Louis Jourdan is fine as the husband, playing with an inner languor and great grace that make the man believable.

Geraldine Page shows great new assurance as the wife. She plays the rising tragedy and the drunken climax with discipline and fine selectiveness.

Charles Dingle is a warm and reassuring family retainer, and David J. Stewart underplays the shepherd most effectively. It is James Dean as the houseboy who clearly and originally underlines the sleazy impertinence and the amoral opportunism which the husband must combat.

# "Lullaby"

Journal-American

February 4, 1954

## New Comedy Just Misses

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE were rumors around Broadway that "Lullaby," a new comedy by Don Appell, was what the trade calls a "sleeper"—an unheralded offering that sneaks into town and becomes a hit. There was another report that it was a sleeper all right but that, as the name implied, it was more of a sedative.

I found when it opened at the Lyceum Theatre last night that both legends were false: it falls somewhere between both categories. It is neither funny enough nor sufficiently stimulating to be much of a success, and it is certainly too loud all the time, and occasionally too bright and engaging to qualify as a solid soporific. It must be listed, therefore, as a near-hit.

This would seem to be caused by two circumstances. First, the principal characters establish themselves almost immediately as types that one would pay almost any price NOT to be concerned with for upwards of two hours; second, there is nothing in the story of what happens to these dreary people that is provocative or promising.

### Moments of Mirth

There are occasional moments of solid mirth and rare intervals of something approaching pathos, but for most of the evening the proceedings are beleaguered by an overpowering disinterest in the destinies of all concerned.

These destinies involve Jack Warden, a truck driver, who has eloped with Kay Medford, a cigaret girl in a New York night club. On his marriage night it is apparent that while outwardly a tough and confident customer he is actually a babe-in-arms when confronted by this brash and experienced doll.

The reason is obvious when his mother tracks him down, endeavors to bust up the marriage and, as all else fails, contrives to move in with them.

It then becomes the ageless conflict of wife and mother-in-law, and it is only a matter of time (too much, I thought) until the young man makes the decision to live his life apart from the dominance of his scheming and hopelessly possessive mother.

### Capable Cast

Mary Boland makes a magnificent pitch at the mother's part, but there is not enough of either sincerity or comedy in the writing to lift her out of the category of a ruthless old bore.

Jack Warden, as her son, proves himself a highly capable comedian and a fine actor, but again this is not enough to compensate for the tantalizing tedium of the role.

As the wife Kay Medford makes a desperate and nearly successful effort to vitalize the evening by being, first, unsufferably tough and, next, unbearably loving and devoted. Here is a brilliant performance, unhappily wasted on a pedestrian tale.

Al Ramsen acquitted himself with honor as a singularly uninhibited bellhop, and Ben Edwards designed a couple of sets to his credit—a hotel room in Pennsylvania and a depressing New York flat.

We see enough such wrangling people in real life; I doubt that many of us wish to spend an evening with them in the theatre.

**"LULLABY"**

Comedy by Don Appell; staged by Jerome Mayer; scenery and lighting by Ben Edwards; presented by Mr. Mayer and Irl Mowery in association with Toby Ruby at the Lyceum Theatre, February 3, 1954. The cast:

A Bellhop.....Al Ramsen
Johnny.....Jack Warden
Eadie.....Kay Medford
The Mother.....Mary Boland

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NEW YORK Herald Tribune

February 4, 1954

THEATER

## 'Lullaby'

By WALTER F. KERR

"LULLABY," the new comedy at the Lyceum, is all about a mother-in-law who decides that her newly married son needs feeding up, and who promptly plants herself at the family table so that she can salt his salad, butter his bread, and shove the basic necessities down his throat.

Don Appell's play needs a bit of feeding up, too. It's a skinny little thing with a heart of gold, a winning smile, and next to nothing on its wistful bones. As a matter of fact, practically everything author Appell has thought of is perfectly all right; he just stopped thinking too early in the day.

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Certainly Mary Boland is a great deal more than all right. Miss Boland hasn't put in an appearance on a local stage for some six years now, but she has lost not an ounce of that brazen, badgering, and triumphant witlessness which was always her fiercest glory. As the doting mama who doesn't mind moving in on some alarmed youngsters—not even the bedroom is safe from her midnight visitations—Miss Boland has herself a small-sized field day. When she is threatening to hurl herself out of an entirely available window, she is very funny. When she is dropping experimentally into a canvas chair that she is clearly never going to get out of, she is funnier still. And when she is flinging a ratty fur-bearing neckpiece over her shoulder with heroic abandon, she is majestically lunatic.

Not that this is one of the star's broader farce jobs. Mr. Appell is unwilling to go all-out in any given direction, and he asks of mama that she be plausible and maybe a bit touching, too. Miss Boland obliges handsomely in every vein, and it isn't her fault that no one of the play's moods ever comes thunderingly home.

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Kay Medford and Jack Warden, as the unhappily invaded newlyweds, are almost equally helpful. Miss Medford is cast as a night-club doll who is first stunned by her good fortune in snaring a husband and then stunned by the dear boy's mother. She plays the girl with a wise eye, a heartily nasal voice, and a rich flair for roaring exasperation. Miss Medford is also adept at switching emotional horses in midstream. She can snarl a comic line with the best of them, or put her foot down stridently when the author wants her to. Yet her simple, childlike pleasure in an anniversary present is affectingly real. The actress is genuine at every odd turn.

Jack Warden's sheepish and put-upon groom is believable in the play's homier patches and wonderfully vigorous whenever the action turns antic. At one point Mr. Warden takes what must be the trickiest stage fall since Buster Keaton left for Hollywood; at another he kicks his heels in a joyously bumbling display of sudden good humor; at still another he crawls back into a living room to have a muffler wrapped about his throat. Each of the images is first-rate farce.

But Mr. Appell isn't really writing a farce and he isn't really reaching for pathos. He's settling for a kind of twilight comic world in which a good many small things are faintly amusing and a good many others are faintly true. His actors give him all kinds of honest support, but nothing can give "Lullaby" much emphasis. The play's basic invention is thin, its complications are thinner, and—as though to call attention to its undernourished frame—it's the shortest play of the season.

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A word might be added about Ben Edwards' settings. They are, respectively, a dingy Scranton hotel room and a tawdry city apartment. These aren't supposed to look like much and it may be a mark of artistic integrity that they don't. But can a cheerful little comedy ever be played against straight bile-green and the mahogany horrors of Grand Rapids 1910? Realism has surely gone too far.

## The New York Times

February 4, 1954

### AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Since Mary Boland plays the part, the mother-in-law joke is more enjoyable than you might expect in Don Appell's "Lullaby," which was put on at the Lyceum last evening. Since Kay Medford and Jack Warden play two of the other three parts, the son and the daughter-in-law are enjoyable, too.

For Mr. Appell's comedy changes emphasis after an uproarious first act, but the performance rolls along with gusto throughout the evening, giving a real flavor of lower middle-class bedlam to the story. Neither Mr. Appell nor Jerome Mayer, the director, aspires to anything more than a funny ruckus in a popular style. They have succeeded.

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In point of fact, "Lullaby" records the difficulties a man in his late thirties has in shaking off the possessiveness of his mother. She is a sweet-talking battle-axe, in case you know the type. If Mr. Appell wanted to be serious about her, he could make her a Krafft-Ebing menace, silver cord and all.

But "Lullaby" is a rough-and-ready comedy about an amiable though commonplace man who declares his freedom from his mother by marrying a night-club cigarette girl. She is better adjusted than he is, and their furtive honeymoon in a Scranton hotel is a hilarious adventure. Mr. Appell has a knack for vernacular and also for incongruous situations. The first act of "Lullaby" is almost straight farce and thoroughly convulsing.

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In the second act Mr. Appell settles down to the problem of evicting the overbearing mother-in-law from the new family. She is crafty, sentimental, pathetic, jealous, vain and domineering. Perhaps she even terrifies Mr. Appell a little. For the second half of "Lullaby" is much soberer than the first.

Under Mr. Mayer's skillful direction the actors do what they can about that, which is considerable. Miss Boland's old bat is in her broadest comic style—rattle-brained, dry, bustling and aggressive. After an absence of six years from Broadway, Miss Boland returns as over-wrought and mercurial as ever, still the professional comedienne.

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As the daughter-in-law and son, respectively, Miss Medford and Mr. Warden make a genuine contribution to the play in the way of characterization and exuberance. Miss Medford's night club cigarette girl is amusing, vulgar and brassy on the surface, but an admirable person, too. Miss Medford has a booming voice, a rolling gait, a knowing expression and also strength of character.

As the bewildered son and frustrated husband, Mr. Warden is the perfect counterpart of geniality, commonness and good-will Even when "Lullaby" is most uproarious in the first act, Miss Medford and Mr. Warden keep their two characters human and disarming. You cannot help respecting those two dopes.

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In the brief part of a grinning, impudent bellhop, Al Ramsen gives a lively performance. Ben Edwards, the scene designer, has supplied a gaudy hotel bedroom and a battered, tawdry apartment for Mr. Appell's cartoon of mother love. The comedy tends to run downhill after a brawling first act. But you would hardly suspect it from the performance. The acting is wonderful.

## Daily Mirror

February 4, 1954

### 'Lullaby' Is a Fine Comedy About Nice People

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Without trying to be facetious, "Lullaby" looks like a "sleeper." The Don Appell comedy slipped into the Lyceum Theatre Wednesday evening without fanfare, and made the first-nighters laugh harder than they have in quite a spell. And it probably made them think and feel a bit, too.

* * *

**IT IS AN** unpretentious play, human, warming and very funny. It has its faults. It's a little on the thin side, with a lull immediately after the rise of the second curtain. But it is easy and pleasant to sit through. One of the most valuable assets for a comedy is the element of recognition. And this, "Lullaby" has in abundance.

**It has to do with a truck driver, tied to his doting mother's apron strings for years, who elopes with a night-club cigaret girl after a three-day courtship. Their wedding night in a second-rate Scranton hotel is hilarious. It could easily have been offensive. Instead, it is amusing and touching.**

It isn't very long before mama tries to take over. Under false colors, she schemes her way into the young couple's apartment. When the bride spurs her backward groom into buying a truck of his own on time, she urges caution. When the girl feels a cold coming on, mama suggests separate bedrooms.

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**IN THE END,** the newlyweds flee to a N. Y. hotel until they can get possession of a bungalow in a Long Island housing development. And you have a feeling that they will do all right in the world. They'll end up with a happy home and money in the bank. And mama will have to like it.

**Kay Medford quit a good job in "Almanac" to act the role of Eadie in "Lullaby." And it was a wise move. For her performance should make her the toast of the town. She is Eadie to the life—a bit hard-boiled, but tender; something of a dreamer but practical withal. Completely irresistible.**

Jack Warden is eminently right as Johnny, torn between affection for his mother and love for his wife. Wanting to be a dutiful son, a good provider and husband. Mary Boland is excellent as the determined mother who puts up a whale of a fight before cutting the silver cord.

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**AND APPRECIATIVE** mention must go to Al Ramsen as a knowing bellhop. When he exceeds the bounds of propriety, Johnny drags him into the bathroom to wash his mouth out with soap. It provides one of the biggest yocks of the season.

**Jerome Mayer, who produced "Lullaby" in association with Irl Mowery and Toby Ruby, has also directed the play with skill and insight. Ben Edwards has designed appropriately dowdy settings.**

If you don't demand perfection, if you are willing to settle for an appealing comedy about nice and likable people, we recommend "Lullaby" to you. We didn't expect much from it, and were agreeably surprise. It gave us a most enjoyable evening at the Lyceum. In our book, it's an ingratiating hit.

## New York Post

February 4, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

### The Husband, the Wife, the Mother

"Lullaby" is the sort of play that defies criticism and probably should defy critics. The new comedy by Don Appell, which opened last night at the Lyceum Theater, is amiable and warm-hearted, it has a lot of pleasantly observant humor, there is a touch of authentic humanity about it, and, as is almost always the case these days, it is excellently acted. In short, it seems to me entirely likely that there is a sizable potential audience for its modest entertainment values, although I must add that I don't belong to that audience.

No one can accuse it of breaking any new ground in the theater. It is the simple and unadorned tale of a shy, ingenuous and mother-dominated truck driver of 38, who marries a nice girl who sells cigarets in a nightclub, and has rather a difficult time keeping his marriage going when his domineering and wheedling mother descends upon him and tries to break up his domestic happiness. He has to stand around in considerable bafflement while wife and mother battle over him, and, in the end, he stages a slight revolt of his own.

**The Three**

There is no more to it than that, and it is to the credit of the author and, in particular, of Mary Boland, Kay Medford and Jack Warden, who have its chief roles, that it manages to be as lively as it is. Mr. Appell can turn a comedy line that is both humorous and believable upon occasion, and there was much understandable laughter at the Lyceum last night. Its three people are credible, also, and the playwright has the commendable ability to make one hope that things will turn out well for the harried husband and the long-suffering wife.

Nevertheless, despite such disarming virtues, I thought "Lullaby" was but intermittently entertaining. There is a bellhop who appears in the first of the two acts, but essentially Mr. Appell has written a three-character play, and it requires far more technical and inventive skill than he possesses to keep so sparsely populated a fable moving along with consistent interest. The result is that the play drops into the doldrums on far too many occasions for its own good and emerges as extremely tenuous theatrical fare.

**The Mother**

Then, I think that there is another basic fault in "Lullaby." It

appears to have difficulty in making up its mind about the mother. She is a very trying woman, who strives to have her way by both bullying and whining. At the same time, her desperate fear of a lonely old age has its touching aspects, and it is possible to think of the same play written to emphasize the tragedy of her plight. As it is, she is neither the one thing nor the other, and her decidedly equivocal position gives the comedy an uncertain quality that is vaguely dissatisfying.

Miss Boland manages the difficult job of showing both aspects of the character with her customary skill, although I thought she was happier at the menace than at the pathos. Mr. Warden succeeds in making the husband likeable without losing the signs of his weakness and indecisiveness. I particularly liked the work of Miss Medford, who presents the decency, sweetness, good sense, exasperation and anger of the wife in a performance of exceptional charm and insight. She is a fine, young actress. I hope I'm in a minority about "Lullaby."

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 4, 1954

# Mary Boland Croons 'Lullaby'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Some astute and often attractive acting is expended on "Lullaby," which stars Mary Boland at the Lyceum Theater.

The play is an old-fashioned, domestic comedy drama. It barely runs two hours, and has an air of having been stretched out from a fair one-hour television vehicle.

**Venomous Mother.**

"Lullaby" is an account of how a nice, plain young man marries a nice, ordinary girl, then has to rescue her and himself from his venomous mother. This situation has served vaudeville, revues and the drama for years. It seems dated now, probably because life is so full of distraction for everybody these days, even in the home.

An older woman who ignores everything to win back her son from his wife is an ugly and ridiculous figure in the theater. She is not touching. And it is pretty hard to make her funny.

The fact that Miss Mary Boland can create as much gaiety as she does out of this play, is great credit to her ingenuity. In fact "Lullaby" is a prime example of actors doing what is called in the theater "playing against" their lines.

**Holty-Toity.**

Miss Boland takes what must seem a harridan on paper, and with farcical gestures and her unique, holty-toity sneer, makes the character highly laughable. In the end, though, she is caught. When the mother is forced to beg for a place in the younger people's home, you cannot take her seriously, or care what happens.

As the daughter-in-law, Kay Medford is doing a similarly contradictory job with what is written. This is all to the good. A girl of 30 has no distinction. A cigaret girl in a nightclub, she loves the guy. But with that you have said everything.

**Avoids Obvious.**

Miss Medford plays her with a blatant voice and a common accent, but she somehow just avoids doing the obvious when the chips are down. The characterization is not tricked up, but it is controlled. Miss Medford's addition of patience holds your interest in a dull girl.

As the not so young husband, Jack Warden has to take a lot before the apron strings are untied. He is so good natured along with being long-suffering, that you root for him even when you wish he would knock down both his women.

**Clinical Story.**

He and Miss Medford are almost able, by their simplicity, to overcome the blackout nature of the wedding night sequence which opens the play. They read its burlesque lines with heart.

The love story, though, is consistently clinical. In the end, all the sincerity in the world cannot cover its embarrassing candor. The young couple's relationship is not necessarily tasteless. It is just frank with very bad judgement.

DAILY NEWS

February 4, 1954

# Mary Boland Returns to Stage in A Light Family Squabble, 'Lullaby'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Any play that brings Mary Boland back to the stage deserves a good notice, for one good turn deserves another. After being away from us for five or six years, Miss Boland returned last evening, on the stage of the Lyceum Theatre, as the star of a family squabble titled "Lullaby." She is, as always, a grand and wonderful farce-comedienne.

"Lullaby" itself is a simple and fairly routine little affair plotwise, but its author, Don Appell, has given it a funny twist here and there and its director, Jerome Mayer, has evoked amusing and engaging performances from all four members of the cast—Miss Boland, Kay Medford, Jack Warden and Al Ramsen. All the first-nighters were enthusiastic, and I did quite a lot of laughing myself—most, perhaps, at Miss Boland's ladylike struggle in the clutches of one of those modernistic chairs made out of a few twists of bar-iron and a swatch of canvas. When she is rescued from the depths of this pitfall she exclaims, with her own mixed air of surprise and indignation, "I thought it was a chair!"

**Interesting Honeymoon.**

Appell begins his little play quite interestingly by revealing Miss Medford and Warden on their honeymoon night in a dispirited hotel in Scranton, Pa. She is a cigaret girl in a third-rate New York night club and he is a truck driver. The only shy truck driver in the world, I guess, for he is a Mama's boy. He calls up Mama in New York to tell her he won't be home for a couple of days, but can't get up the nerve to tell her he has married.

And no wonder—for Mama, when she flies in to Scranton next day to see what her 30-year-old baby boy is up to, is revealed as the talkingest and most possessive mother alive, and furthermore she is the widow of a bootlegger who prefers her own home-made gin because it is 180-proof.

**Kay Medford Appealing.**

This honeymoon scene is an unusually adroit little sketch as Miss Medford and Warden become acquainted in spite of the interruptions of Ramsen, a leering bellboy. Funny, too, is the next scene, in which Mother arrives. Miss Medford, a tall, good-looking young woman with a voice like a busted brass gong, is unusually appealing as the cigaret-girl bride, and Warden is delightfully earnest and slow-witted as the bridegroom.

The remaining two scenes of the comedy are obvious, being the old story of how Mother interferes until the young people run out on her to have a life of their own. But Miss Boland, with her fluttery ways, her rolling, big blue eyes, her alternating spasms of indignation and self-pity, is the most masterly of meddlers. She rarely stops talking, and this is a good thing—and when she does stop talking she is doing something amusing. Like glaring, for instance. Or sniffing. And nobody can be better than she is at timing a punch-line.

"Lullaby" isn't anything terrific or smashing or novel but it's fun.